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Testimony before Connecticut General Assembly
Select Committee on Children
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Senate Bill 983 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CHRISTINA TAYLOR GREEN
CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DISASTER AND TERRORISM ACT

Good afternoon Madam Chair Urban and Members of the Select Committee on Children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 983.

I am Bruce Lockwood, a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM), President of Region 1 (New England) for the International Association of Emergency Managers – US Council, founding member and Past President of the Connecticut Emergency Management Association and a member of the State of Connecticut's Child Safety Crisis Response Committee.

I am also a member of the National Commission on Children and Disasters and serve as Chair of the Subcommittee on Evacuation, Transportation and Housing.

President George W. Bush and Congress created the bi-partisan Commission in 2007 to identify and recommend ways to fix gaps in emergency planning and management for children.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, children represent nearly 25% of the American population; 74 million are 18 years of age or under¹.

In Connecticut, that equates to over 800,000 children.

One would think children would be a top priority in disaster planning and management, but sadly, at all levels of government across our nation, the unique needs of children historically have been unaddressed.

Instead, the needs of able-bodied adults are considered, while children are placed into categories with several other populations such as persons with disabilities, with limited English proficiency and the elderly. These groups collectively are labeled "at risk" "vulnerable" or "special needs."

¹ US Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, July 1, 2009;
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/09000.html>

As a consequence, not enough consideration is given to children when disaster plans are written and exercised, when equipment and medicines are purchased, when disaster response and recovery efforts are activated.

Children are not simply "little adults."

I am pleased Senate Bill 983 recognizes this fact by ensuring that Connecticut's 800,000-plus children receive the focused attention they deserve when it comes to preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies and disasters.

Senate Bill 983 also recognizes that disaster management is a shared responsibility that cannot depend on a single government agency nor be approached on a piecemeal basis. All agencies must work together in a coordinated manner.

Senate Bill 983 recognizes that children are most vulnerable when they are away from their families at school or child care; and that it is essential for schools and child care providers to be prepared to provide a safe and secure environment for children before, during and after a disaster.

But I also want to suggest a way to make the bill more effective.

In Section 2 of the bill, rather than creating a separate plan for children, the directive should be to more fully and consistently integrate children into emergency and disaster planning efforts across state and local governments. Separate plans typically are of little use to emergency managers because they end up as annexes relegated to the back of the base plan, and therefore, aren't considered a priority.

Therefore, the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, in consultation with all the named departments and individuals in the bill, should review and amend the State emergency plan to integrate children's needs throughout the document. In addition, the roles and responsibilities for all of the named departments should be integrated into the State emergency plan and each agency should also have a disaster plan that indicates how it will continue operations and support local agencies to meet the needs of children. I would also recommend that the Committee consider adding the juvenile justice and court systems to the bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. Senate Bill 983 is a major step toward ensuring that Connecticut protects its most precious assets: children.